

# Workplace Conflict: Unavoidable, but Manageable

Disagreements among people who work, interact, or do business together offer the potential for conflict. Conflict can even be healthy when it promotes creativity and does not stifle productivity.

Workplace conflicts can take many forms: personality differences between co-workers, differences in goals or methods between supervisors and employees, rivalries between employees in different units, or differences in desired outcomes between employees and clients. When a conflict arises, the parties form sides. Positions start to harden and communication stops. How do we manage the conflict? Two key answers are: minimize conflict, and resolve conflicts as early as possible in their development.

Efforts to minimize conflict must be woven into the organizational culture. Some specific strategies to consider include:

1. Make fairness a fundamental organizational practice.
2. Create an environment that encourages open, multidirectional communication.
3. Have managers serve as role models for the characteristics and practices expected of employees.

4. Clearly define organizational objectives and demonstrate ongoing pursuit of those objectives.
5. Value employee development and make training a priority.
6. Value diversity and provide ongoing awareness of diversity issues.

Is this all it takes? Hardly, but each of these strategies will minimize the incidence of conflicts. The goal should be to reach a solution that will enable the disagreeing parties to work together productively from that point forward.

## Mediation for Conflict Resolution

Mediation is an effective conflict management process for resolving disagreement in the workplace. The parties participate in problem-solving techniques and negotiations—with a neutral mediator—in order to generate solutions satisfactory to all parties.

Mediators do not serve as decision-making authorities and do not determine who is “right” or “wrong.” Their role is to assist the parties in communicating their individual needs and in seeking agreement or settlement to the dispute.

The Georgia Merit System’s Dispute Resolution Service has certified mediators available throughout the state and will select a mediator based on the needs of your organization, your location, the nature of the conflict, and the demographics of the parties involved. Mediators have undergone intensive training in conflict resolution skills, negotiation skills, and problem solving techniques. Additionally, each has completed practicum requirements for certification.

The mediators volunteer their services through the State Dispute Resolution Service. The only costs to your agency would be reimbursement for travel and subsistence expenses incurred during the mediation.

Resolving conflict is a process. When communication conquers conflict, everyone wins! For more information, visit [www.gms.state.ga.us/agency/services/disputeres.asp](http://www.gms.state.ga.us/agency/services/disputeres.asp).

**GMS Customer Service Division  
Employee Management Relations:  
“General/Civil Mediation Training”  
December 10-15, 2001  
529A Church St., Decatur, GA  
for information or to register:  
[www.gms.state.ga.us/employee/training.asp](http://www.gms.state.ga.us/employee/training.asp)**

## EXECUTIVE VISION

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# EXECUTIVE Vision

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## Pursuing the Governor's Diversity Initiative

# Diversity Advisory Council at Work on Strategic Diversity Management Plan

On July 25, Governor Roy Barnes held a swearing-in ceremony for the members of the newly created Georgia Diversity Advisory Council—and sent them straight to work. They are charged with creating a blueprint for every agency and department in state government of how to practice effective diversity management. They will preside over this cultural change as these strategies are institutionalized. And, they will assess the effectiveness of the strategic diversity plan and report its progress semi-annually to the governor.

Georgia Merit System Commissioner Marjorie Young chairs the Diversity Advisory Council, and its members—commissioners, directors and representatives of State agencies and offices with the authority to effect change—all have a huge stake in the outcome of their work.

As Mike Galifianakis, State ADA Director for the Georgia State Financing and Investment Commission, puts it, “My fellow

council members are very involved, very engaged in dialogue, and committed to the program. It’s critical to maintain a positive, proactive environment to work in. And it’s important for the State of Georgia to stay out front.”

Georgia’s diversity management plan incorporates sound business objectives to enhance the efficiency, productivity and effectiveness of state government. Gordon Joyner, Executive Director of the Georgia Commission on Equal Opportunity says, “The spiraling growth in the overall diversity of the residents of Georgia makes the establishment of the Georgia Diversity Advisory Council timely and appropriate.

### What diversity is—and isn’t

*Diversity* is essentially the expression of differences in attitudes, perceptions and behaviors. A *diversity mixture* is any combination of individuals who are different in some ways and similar in others. As Commissioner Kenneth Breeden of the Depart-



Members of the Georgia Diversity Advisory Council began work immediately after their swearing-in ceremony on July 25. From left to right, front to back: Mike Galifianakis, Brenda Cornelius, June DiPolito, Governor Roy Barnes, Marjorie Young, Gail Buckner, Irving Mitchell and Gilda Watters; Orlando Martinez, Gary Redding, Dr. Peyton Williams, Gordon Joyner, Eric Robinson and Linda Davis.

ment of Technical and Adult Education explains, “Diversity is *not* affirmative action or an equal opportunity program. It is just good business.”

Commissioner Orlando Martinez of the Department of Juvenile Justice concurs: “Diversity is not the ‘buzzword of the month’—there’s too much at stake if Georgia is to remain

a desirable place to live and work, and stay competitive in the global marketplace.” That’s why *diversity management* is a *process* to utilize the full talents of the workforce, and to guarantee full support for the State’s mission, vision and goals.

June DiPolito, Director of the Pineland Community Service

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## Future Trends in Diversity

A recent diversity study<sup>1</sup> identified several trends that will have a profound effect on the way we do business in this country and in Georgia.

**American society will become more diverse**—immigration and the growth of diverse groups will make the term “minority” obsolete.

**Corporations will become increasingly global**—businesses will draw on their diverse employees’ talents to compete worldwide.

**Diversity will become a business issue**—rather than a legal, social or moral issue, it will be linked to competitive strategies.

**Diverse work teams will**

**become reality**—upping the potential for innovation and creativity.

**Senior managers will get more involved in diversity**—to effectively utilize their workforce’s potential.

**Minorities will make more money**—and will expect to see themselves and their values in the products and services they buy and

the organizations they buy from.

**Managers will deal with backlash**—and will have to learn how to reduce friction to avoid loss of productivity.

**Diversity training will be integrated with other training**—all designed for workforce members to maximize their full potential.

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Research in Vocational Education (1997), *Current Status and Future Trends of Diversity Initiatives in the Workplace: Diversity Experts Perspective*.

## ViewPoint

# Why Diversity Management is Good Business

By Governor Roy E. Barnes



The State of Georgia faces immense opportunities and challenges in serving and responding to its increasingly diverse population. Our people come from varied backgrounds and cultures and have a rich mix of ideas and experiences. To meet Georgia's strategic goals—including quality education, workforce planning, workplace

safety, economic development and accountable government—it is imperative that state agencies capitalize on the potential contributions of our diverse workforce.

This makes sound business sense. Our state cannot remain competitive in the global marketplace unless each agency and department focuses on maximizing the productivity, creativity and commitment of its personnel while meeting the needs of our diverse constituents and customers. That is the essence of diversity management.

Georgia has an opportunity, and indeed a mandate to become a recognized leader in the area of workforce diversity management.

I have recently issued an Executive Order supporting a statewide Diversity Initiative and establishing the Georgia Diversity Advisory Council. The

Council is charged with creating a strategic diversity plan, identifying present and future diversity issues, providing diversity education and training strategies to agency and department heads, and publishing semi-annual progress reports on the diversity initiative.

In the coming months, you will hear more from the Diversity Advisory Council. They will be initiating strategies that will attract, recruit, develop and retain a highly competent workforce to meet the needs of our constituents. These strategies will capitalize on the best each employee has to offer by empowering them with opportunities, tools and support, and will rigorously enforce zero tolerance for any form of discrimination, harassment or exclusionary practice. The Council will communi-

cate Georgia's diversity management message to stakeholders, partners, customers, vendors and constituents.

Diversity is here. The challenge for all of us in State government is to be willing and able

“In order to serve and represent every Georgian, our agencies and departments must recognize the State's growing diversity. This Council will be an invaluable resource that will help us identify the areas in which diversity is needed.”

— Governor Roy E. Barnes

to interact effectively with each other, to leverage our attitudes and behaviors in pursuit of our common goal.

## Diversity Advisory Council

continued from page 1

Board, says, “I bring a rural, South Georgia perspective to the Council. Working with people with disabilities, I have always promoted inclusion of all persons, with sensitivity and a celebration of differences.”

This initiative dovetails with other important state programs like workforce planning and PerformancePLUS. As GMS Commissioner Young said, “The diversity initiative is of vital importance to the State of Georgia. We need to embrace the opportunity to recruit and retain a talented, diverse workforce that will help us meet the needs of our diverse constituents and customers.”

### Members of the Georgia Diversity Advisory Council:

**Marjorie H. Young**, Commissioner, Georgia Merit System (Chair); **Gary B. Redding**, Commissioner, Department of Community Health; **Orlando L. Martinez**, Commissioner, Department of Juvenile Justice; **Kenneth H. Breeden**, Commissioner, Department of Technical and Adult Education; **Jim Martin**, Commissioner, Department of Human Resources; **Brenda Foye Cornelius**, Commissioner, Governor's Office of Human Relations; **Irving Mitchell**, Director of Business Development, Office of the Governor; **Russ Toal**, Executive Director, Georgia Cancer Coalition; **L. Gale Buckner**, Director, Criminal

Justice Coordinating Council; **Mike Galifianakis**, State ADA Director, Georgia State Financing and Investment Commission; **Gordon L. Joyner**, Executive Director, Georgia Commission on Equal Opportunity; **Larry J. Singer**, CIO/Executive Director, Georgia Technology Authority; **June A. DiPolito**, Director, Pine-land Community Service Board; **Gilda Watters**, Director, Governor's Small Business Center; **Eric M. Robinson**, Deputy Director, Senate Research Office; **Peyton Williams Jr.**, Deputy Superintendent for External Affairs, Georgia Department of Education; **Linda Davis**, RN, Buford Health Center.

## CALENDAR

### (CSPA) COUNCIL FOR STATE PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION FALL CONFERENCE

Augusta Radisson Riverfront Hotel, Augusta, GA

October 31-November 2, 2001

### DIVERSITY STRATEGIES FOR THE EXECUTIVE SUITE

The Hyatt Regency, Atlanta, GA

November 6-7, 2001

[www.hunt-scanlonconferences.com](http://www.hunt-scanlonconferences.com)

### WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

New Challenges, New Opportunities

San Diego, CA

December 3-5, 2001

[www.shrm.org/conferences/diversity/index.html](http://www.shrm.org/conferences/diversity/index.html)



# NEWSBRIEFS

## GETTING INVOLVED AFTER NATIONAL TRAGEDY

The terrorist events that rocked this country on September 11 will leave lingering trauma long after the initial shock has faded. Businesses and government agencies alike will be reassessing their security measures. Employers should consider leave programs and resources for employees in times of crisis, as well as implementing EAP programs if they already are not in place.

Several national and world organizations have mobilized to assist victims. Here are some things that can be done to help:

### • **Red Cross Blood Donations**

To make an appointment for blood donations, call 1-800-GIVE-LIFE (1-800-448-3543). To learn more about blood donation opportunities, visit [www.givelife.org](http://www.givelife.org)

### • **World Trade Center/ Pentagon Fund**

The Federal Employee Education and Assistance Fund (FEEA) has formed a fund to assist federal families affected by the terrorist attacks. The fund provides families with

immediate assistance for medical, funeral and travel costs. Donations to the World Trade Center/Pentagon Fund can be made by credit card, calling FEEA at (303) 933-7580, or by sending a check to: FEEA World Trade Center/Pentagon Fund  
8441 W. Bowles Ave., Ste. 200  
Littleton, Colo. 80123-9501

### • **Salvation Army**

To donate money to the Salvation Army call 1-800-SAL ARMY.

— *WorldatWork Newsline*, 9/12/01

## EEOC WITHDRAWS ADEA INTERPRETATION AFTER APPEAL RULING

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has officially withdrawn its current interpretation of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) as it applies to retiree health benefit plans, says a report from the American Benefits Council (ABC).

The policy was rescinded after the August 2000 decision by the Third Circuit federal appeals court in the case of County Retirees Association v. County of Erie. The court decided the ADEA law applies to employers who provide different health care

benefits for retirees younger than age 65 who are eligible for Medicare after reaching age 65.

The court's ruling leaves employers who voluntarily provide health benefits to retirees in an uncertain position. Employers would be required to verify that retirees who are 65 years or older have access to health benefits of "an equal benefit or equal cost" to those provided to retirees younger than age 65. For employers who cannot meet the court's "equal benefits or equal cost" test, their only alternatives might be to reduce benefits to younger retirees or eliminate retiree health coverage entirely.

The EEOC has indicated that it will now move to develop new guidance on how the "equal benefit or equal cost" standard should apply to retiree health benefits.

— *WorldatWork Newsline*, 8/21/01

## GEORGIA'S ECONOMY BETTER THAN U.S.

*State Labor Commissioner Michael Thurmond assesses the current conditions in Georgia:*

While the weakened economy has led to thousands of layoffs in Georgia, laid-off workers are finding new jobs much faster in our state than in other parts of

the country. The average time it takes a newly-unemployed worker in Georgia to find another job is 8.9 weeks; the national average is 13.3 weeks.

Though Georgia's economy slowed considerably, the number of jobs in the state made a modest gain during the past year.

In July 2001, we had 21,700 more jobs than exactly a year ago. That represents an overall growth rate of .5 percent. Some growth areas include retail trade, which gained 15,500 jobs, wholesale trade with an additional 1,600 jobs, health services with 9,400 more jobs, and communications, which increased by 4,100 jobs.

In education, the number of jobs in state schools is up by 3,600 and local school systems have 4,700 more jobs.

We've also lost jobs in some areas during the July 2000 to July 2001 period, with manufacturing and temporary employment services being the two sectors hit the hardest. Georgia lost 20,000 manufacturing jobs, while the temporary employment industry lost 24,000. The overall finance industry lost 3,900 jobs, with most of that loss coming in metro Atlanta.

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# Managers' E-mails May Impede Communication

E-mail, while revolutionizing communication, has introduced misunderstandings into the workplace. Because it's not a live dialogue, it can leave the recipient feeling resentful or powerless. What could have been cleared up quickly in a face-to-face conversation may fester as a misinterpreted e-mail message.

There are no standards of etiquette for e-mail: it's not interactive like a phone conversation, nor as formal as written correspondence. When in doubt, read it out loud before you send it: if it sounds abrupt or less-than-

polite, chances are the recipient will take it that way.

Tone is the main cause of e-mail misunderstandings. According to a survey of 1,000 workers, more than half said that the tone of the e-mail they receive makes it easy to leap to the wrong conclusions. There's no body language, tone of voice, or eye contact. As one respondent put it, "A lot of managers don't even bother to say please, or thank you, or even sign their names. That doesn't make you rush to do what they want."

How managers communicate

affects productivity, morale and retention. While all employees can benefit from help and training with e-mail, managers need it most. They have to set the example for other employees.

Managers should apply care and attention to both internal and external e-mail communication. Communication with courtesy makes the workplace positive and productive.

### E-mail Etiquette Tips

- Make sure recipients can open attachments before you send them.

- Send group mail and "reply to all" sparingly.
- Collect everything you have to say in one e-mail.
- Use detailed subject lines to introduce your messages.
- Respond to messages as quickly as possible, preferably the same day.
- Agree on organization acronyms for subject lines.
- Use the "out of office" feature when you're traveling.
- Proofread and spell-check your e-mail as you would any letter.

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